Coping with Crisis

Learning from the Acts of the Apostles (1)
Acts 9:43-11:18

Kieran J. O'Mahony OSA
www.tarsus.ie



Programme

(1) **Cornelius (Part I)**

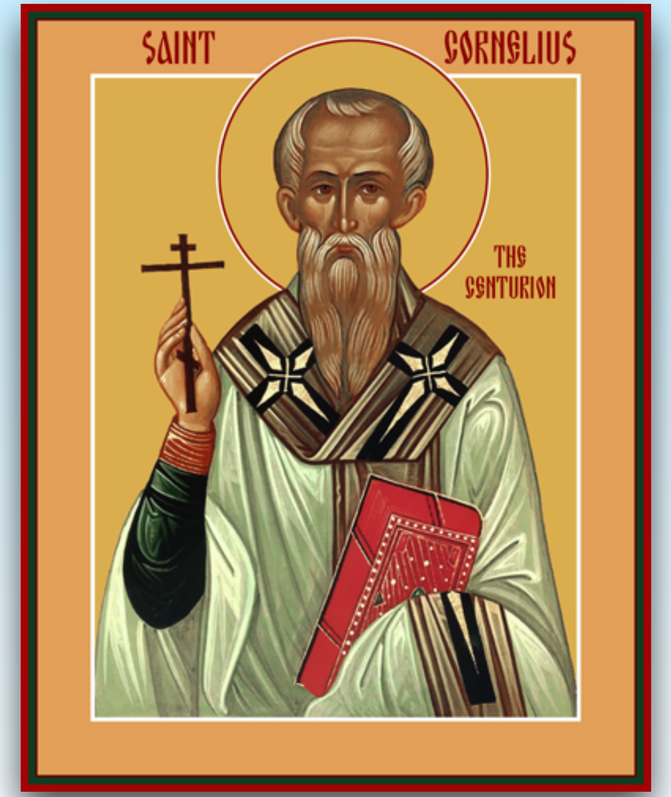
(2) Cornelius (Part II)

(3) Council of Jerusalem (Part I)

(4) Council of Jerusalem (Part II)

Sequence

- ☆ Welcome
- ☆ The Acts of the Apostles
- ☆ Setting in the Acts (incl. Caesarea)
- ☆ An interesting omission
- ☆ Dramatic Analysis
- ☆ Commentary (Part I)
- ☆ *Commentary (Part II)*
- ☆ *A conversion story*
- ☆ *And for today?*



Welcome

- Into the unknown future.
- Tradition (capital T) and traditions (lower case)
- Keeping, letting go, innovating.
- Learning from the early church: the ritual law.
- NB: no teaching from Jesus.
- But, inspiration from his actions…



TASK FORCE
Building Hope
Archdiocese of Dublin

"Synodality refers to the very essence of the Church, her constitutive reality, and is thus oriented towards evangelization. It is an ecclesial way of being and a prophetic example for today's world."

The Acts of the Apostles

- **Story** from the death of Jesus to the death of Paul (c. 35 years).
  - Highly selective.
  - Identifiable emphases.
- Who was the **author**?
  - Well-educated.
  - Well-travelled.
  - Excellent Greek.
  - At home in the upper middle class of the Hellenistic world.
- **Date**: around AD 110-115
- Paul Ricoeur: three kinds of **historiography**.
  - Documentary History.
  - Explanatory History.
  - Poetic History.

Setting in the Acts

- Acts 9:32-11:18: a unit of teaching.
- 3 Stories about Peter: (1) 9:32-35; (2) 9:36-43; (3) 10:1-11:18 = (a) 10:1-19 *the events* and (b) 11:1-18 *the justification of the events*.
- All three stories take place in Judea (incl. the administrative capital, Caesarea (on the coast).
- The 3 stories follow on 3 stories about the Hellenists in 6:8-8:40.



- Caesarea: largely Gentile population.
- Centre of Roman administration and the army.
- Site of some of Herod's greatest building programmes.
- **Cohors II Italica Civium Romanorum.**
- No evidence that the Italian Cohort was in Caesarea before the 60s.
- No evidence that it was anywhere else either!




כתובת הקדשה
DEDICATORY INSCRIPTION
TIBERIEVM
PONTIVS PILATVS
PRAEFECTVS IVDAEAE
E
Pontius Pilatus was the Roman prefect who presided over the trial of Jesus of Nazareth (Matt. 27:11-26). The content of the inscription and the use of the Latin language hint at the level of Romanization throughout the province, and in Caesarea, at the beginning of the 1st c. A.D.







Setting in the Acts

Acts	Jesus	OT	Paul
9:32-35 Aeneas	Lk 5:18-26 Paralysed Man		14:8-12 Crippled man
9:36-43 Tabitha	Lk 8:40-56 Jairus' daughter	1 Kgs 17 / 2 Kgs 4 Zarephath / Shunem	20:7-12 Eutychus
10 Centurion	Lk 7:2-10 Centurion	2 Kgs 5 Naaman	Chs. 13-28 The Gentile Mission

Setting in the Acts

- **Meanwhile he stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.** (Acts 9:43)
- Lev 11:39-43 – a tanner is *perpetually* unclean.
- Rabbinic tradition:
  - A father ought not to teach his son to be a tanner.
  - It was easier for a tanner's wife to get a divorce.
  - A synagogue could not be sold for use as a tannery.
  - A tannery could not be within 50 cubits from a town.
- So: this throw-away remark indicates that Peter *already* thinks that the purity laws do not apply to the ritually unclean or to those who associate with them.



House of Simon

- Identified by tradition / devotion.
- Privately owned.
- It receives no mention in Jerry Murphy-O'Connor's *Oxford Guide to The Holy Land* nor in *The New Encyclopaedia of the Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*.

An interesting omission

Mark 7:1 Now the Pharisees and some of the experts in the law
who came from Jerusalem gathered around him. **2** And they saw that
some of Jesus' disciples ate their bread with unclean hands, that is,
unwashed. **3** (For the Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they
perform a ritual washing, holding fast to the tradition of the elders. **4**
And when they come from the marketplace, they do not eat unless they
wash. They hold fast to many other traditions: the washing of cups, pots,
kettles, and dining couches.) **5** The Pharisees and the experts in the law
asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of
the elders, but eat with unwashed hands?" **6** He said to them, "Isaiah
prophesied correctly about you hypocrites, as it is written:

> '***This people honours me with their lips,***
> ***but their heart is far from me***.
> **7** ***They worship me in vain,***
> ***teaching as doctrine the commandments of men***.'

Mark 7:8 Having no regard for the command of God, you hold fast to
human tradition." **9** He also said to them, "You neatly reject the
commandment of God in order to set up your tradition. **10** For Moses
said, '***Honour your father and your mother***,' and, '***Whoever insults his
father or mother must be put to death***.' **11** But you say that if anyone
tells his father or mother, 'Whatever help you would have received from
me is *corban*' (that is, a gift for God), **12** then you no longer permit him
to do anything for his father or mother. **13** Thus you nullify the word of
God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many
things like this."

Mark 7:14 Then he called the crowd again and said to them, "Listen
to me, everyone, and understand. **15** There is nothing outside of a
person that can defile him by going into him. Rather, it is what comes
out of a person that defiles him."

Mark 7:17 Now when Jesus had left the crowd and entered the
house, his disciples asked him about the parable. **18** He said to them,
"Are you so foolish? Don't you understand that whatever goes into a
person from outside cannot defile him? **19** For it does not enter his
heart but his stomach, and then goes out into the sewer." (This means all
foods are clean.) **20** He said, "What comes out of a person defiles him.
21 For from within, out of the human heart, come evil ideas, sexual
immorality, theft, murder, **22** adultery, greed, evil, deceit, debauchery,
envy, slander, pride, and folly. **23** All these evils come from within and
defile a person."

Dramatic Analysis

(9:43): Peter a guest at home of Simon

Scene 1 (10:1-8): Cornelius (revelation)

Scene 2 (10:9-16): Peter (revelation)

Scene 3 (10:17-23a): Peter meets the envoys of Cornelius

Interlude (10:23b-27) Journey of Peter and entourage; meeting of Peter and Cornelius

Scene 4 (10:28-48) Peter and Cornelius in the latter's home in Caesarea

a. (28-33) Peter and Cornelius converse

b. (34-43) Peter's address to Cornelius and his household

c. (44-46a) The Spirit falls upon the listeners (revelation)

d. (46b-48a) Peter directs that they be baptised

(48b): Peter a guest at the home of Cornelius

Scene 5 (11:1-18) Peter explains his actions to the community at Jerusalem

Dramatic Analysis

- ☆ Events are narrated (10:1-49)
- ☆ Events are recounted (11:1-18)
- ☆ Later recalled: (15:7-11, 14)
- ☆ Cf. the three-fold repetition of Paul's conversion

Dramatic Analysis

- Why such emphasis?
  - Purity laws prohibited contact with Gentiles
  - Gentiles will be included—but only at the time of the End
  - Finally, Luke's *interesting omission* of Mark 7:1-23, with its key affirmation: Thus he declared all foods clean (Mark 7:19)

Dramatic Analysis

- Notice the series of parallel events:
  - 2 visions
  - 2 journeys
  - 2 speeches
  - 2 confirmations of the result
- Such care indicates Lucan composition

Scene 1 (10:1-8)

Acts 10:1 Now there was a man in Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion of what was known as the Italian Cohort. **2** He was a devout, God-fearing man, as was all his household; he did many acts of charity for the people and prayed to God regularly. **3** About three o'clock one afternoon he saw clearly in a vision an angel of God who came in and said to him, "Cornelius." **4** Staring at him and becoming greatly afraid, Cornelius replied, "What is it, Lord?" The angel said to him, "Your prayers and your acts of charity have gone up as a memorial before God. **5** Now send men to Joppa and summon a man named Simon, who is called Peter. **6** This man is staying as a guest with a man named Simon, a tanner, whose house is by the sea." **7** When the angel who had spoken to him departed, Cornelius called two of his personal servants and a devout soldier from among those who served him, **8** and when he had explained everything to them, he sent them to Joppa.

Scene 1 (10:1-8)

- Genre: "Angelophany" with command (cf. Gen 19:12; Josh 5:13-15; 1 Chr 21:15-30 etc.)
- Angelophanies in Lk-Acts: Lk 1:5-23, 26-38, 2:8-20; 24:1-11; Acts 1:6-11.
  - *Introduction (1-2)*
  - *Angel (3)*
  - *Fear (4a)*
  - *Command (4b-6)*
  - *Obedience (7)*
- One of the God-fearers (cf. Aphrosidias inscription)
- Three o'clock = the ninth hour. Cf. One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at **three o'clock** in the afternoon. (Acts 3:1)
- Memorial = sacrifice (Ps 141:2; Sir 35:6; 50:16)
- Joppa = Jaffa



Scene 2 (10:9-16)

Acts 10:9 About noon the next day, while they were on their way and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. **10** He became hungry and wanted to eat, but while they were preparing the meal, a trance came over him. **11** He saw heaven opened and an object something like a large sheet descending, being let down to earth by its four corners. **12** In it were all kinds of four-footed animals and reptiles of the earth and wild birds. **13** Then a voice said to him, “Get up, Peter; slaughter and eat!” **14** But Peter said, “Certainly not, Lord, for I have never eaten anything defiled and ritually unclean!” **15** The voice spoke to him again, a second time, “What God has made clean, you must not consider ritually unclean!” **16** This happened three times, and immediately the object was taken up into heaven.

Scene 2 (10:9-16)

- A double vision (Cornelius and Peter); widespread in antiquity; cf. Paul and Ananias.
- Prayer: Lk 3:21-22; 6:12-16; 9;28-31; 22:39-46; Acts 1:14; 13:1-3.
- The “contraption” appears 3 times (of course!)
- Test: Lk 4:3-11; Ezek 4:14
- Clean / unclean: Rom 14:14; Mk 7:15; 1 Tim 4:1-4

Scene 3 (10:17-23a)

Acts 10:17 Now while Peter was puzzling over what the vision he had seen could signify, the men sent by Cornelius had learned where Simon's house was and approached the gate. **18** They called out to ask if Simon, known as Peter, was staying there as a guest. **19** While Peter was still thinking seriously about the vision, the Spirit said to him, "Look! Three men are looking for you. **20** But get up, go down, and accompany them without hesitation, because I have sent them." **21** So Peter went down to the men and said, "Here I am, the person you're looking for. Why have you come?" **22** They said, "Cornelius the centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man, well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to summon you to his house and to hear a message from you." **23** So Peter invited them in and entertained them as guests.

Scene 3 (10:17-23a)

- Simultaneous narrative (easy in cinema; tricky in narrative).
- Peter is pondering.
- The message is given four times: to Peter in a vision (1), in an audition (2), by the Spirit (3) and in the report about Cornelius (4).
- Rem: house of Simon the tanner; rem. these are Gentiles, with whom it is not customary to eat.
- Zenizō: to show hospitality, receive as a guest, entertain.

Thus far…

- Topic: integration of the Gentiles into The Way.
- The piety of a Gentile – deep, sincere, practical and obedient.
- The resistance of Peter – the “contraption” appears three times.
- The work of the Spirit – ahead of the believers’ convictions.